We Don't Fight Fair

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We Don't Fight Fair

by IBegToDreamAndDiffer

Summary

When Will's encephalitis is found and cured, Hannibal's plans crumble. Before he can think of a new one, a serial killer attacks Hannibal and Will in the former's office, forcing Hannibal to fight back. And, with his head now clear, Will finally puts the pieces together.

Notes

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'I had no idea,' Hannibal said slowly, confidently, the lie falling easily from his lips, 'that there was anything medically wrong with him.'

He and Jack Crawford were standing in Will's hospital room, the profiler unconscious due to his treatment. The doctors had decided that it would be easier, and less painful, if they simply kept Will induced until he was healthy.

Hannibal had been called two days earlier by Alana, who had informed him that Will had collapsed at the BAU. He'd then had a seizure, and had briefly been concious when brought into the hospital. His mutterings and symptoms had prompted the on-call doctor to order a brain scan, which had revealed Will's untreated encephalitis.

None of Hannibal's annoyance showed when Jack asked, 'Dr Sutcliffe didn't find *anything*?'

Hannibal pursed his lips, as though thinking, and was aware of Jack's dark eyes on him as he answered. 'No,' he said. 'However, I did leave the observation room briefly to get a cup of coffee. Dr Sutcliffe noticed that I was lethargic, and suggested the coffee machine in the doctor's lounge. By the time I returned he had completed Will's scans and was pulling up the results.' He pursed his lips once more before adding, 'He could have hidden them.'

'But *why*?' Jack huffed. Clearly he had been thinking along those lines, and with a bit of nudging, Hannibal would be able to incriminate the deceased Sutcliffe and hide his own involvement.

'Not much is known about encephalitis, at least not how it directly effects the brain. To study it would be to force someone through what Will has been living with for the past few months. Perhaps,' Hannibal mused, 'Dr Sutcliffe simply wished to study it.'

'And force Will to have hallucinations, delusions, and generally lose his mind,' Jack growled.

'I didn't say I agreed with him,' Hannibal said, drawing Jack's gaze, 'only that I understood. A morally wrong decision, of course, but understandable by fellow curious doctors.'

Jack snorted and shook his head before pulling his hands from his pockets. Rubbing his face briefly, Jack muttered, 'I'm gonna go find some coffee,' and left the room.

Hannibal was suddenly alone with Will for the first time in a week. He hadn't seen Will since their last appointment, and every time Hannibal had briefly visited Will in the hospital, the younger man had been unconscious and his room filled with colleagues. Alana had been present the most, followed by Agent Katz and finally Zeller and Price. Jack, of course, had been hanging around in a constant foul mood, no doubt blaming himself in some way for Will's current condition.

It was nobody's fault. Well, it was *Hannibal's* fault, but Hannibal had no plans to admit that to anybody. Will's current condition was the product of Hannibal's manipulations, and Hannibal was dismayed by the outcome. He had hoped to push Will over the edge, into the darkness, before getting the man treated.

Hannibal sighed slightly and briefly checked his watch before stepping further towards the bed. He let himself drink Will in- his mere presence, Hannibal able to fully devour without fear of Will catching the dark hunger in his eyes. Hannibal had patients to see to, a schedule to keep, which unfortunately couldn't be changed just because Will had prematurely landed himself in hospital.

He still had to fake his notes on his and Will's last few sessions. Alana had already asked to see them, and Hannibal had agreed to make copies and bring them in for both her and Jack. A fake clock to be drawn, a few notes stricken from the record, etcetera. With any luck, Hannibal could show the appropriate amount of shame to Alana and Jack over his missing Will's encephalitis. It wouldn't do for anyone to discover his manipulations, after all.

Another glance at his watch and Hannibal stepped up to the bed, hand darting out briefly to pat Will's covered foot.

'Soon, dear William,' he murmured before turning and leaving the room.

{oOo}

Hannibal was pleased when, six days after being released from the hospital, Will called to book an appointment.

It was for three o'clock, rather than seven or eight, and Hannibal was surprised, but didn't voice it as he led Will into his office. He preferred to see Will after his other patients so they could talk as long as they wanted, and as he didn't have any patients after one on a Thursday afternoon, he was more than happy to see Will.

'May I say that you're looking healthy, Will?' Hannibal said as he sat.

Will was already seated in the chair opposite him, and smiled slightly, though his eyes darted off to the side, still embarrassed and wanting to avoid eye contact whenever possible.

'Thank you,' he murmured.

'I also feel that I owe you an apology,' Hannibal said.

Will frowned and looked up. 'For what?' he questioned.

'I missed your illness,' Hannibal lied, smoothing a hand over one of his thighs. 'If I had caught it sooner I could have saved you a lot of pain.'

'It wasn't your fault, Dr Lecter,' Will stated firmly. 'You couldn't have known.'

'I suggested you see Dr Sutcliffe,' Hannibal pointed out.

'And it was he who lied to me,' Will said, 'not you.'

Hannibal's lips twitched, and he wondered what Will would say if he knew the truth. 'Regardless,' Hannibal said, 'I want to offer my apologies. I'm a doctor, and we take it personally when we miss something.' He paused. 'Especially when it involves a friend.'

Will offered him another small smile, and Hannibal drank it in greedily when Will wasn't looking. His obsession with Will hadn't waned, Hannibal realised, even with the loss of Will's encephalitis and with it Hannibal's carefully laid plans. Hannibal had decided, right after Alana had called to inform him of Will's collapse, that he would just have to come up with something else. He could perhaps push Will into believing that Hannibal was still the only person who truly understood, and cared, for him; after all, Hannibal would not treat Will any differently, even now that he was more or less stable. Hannibal would be a constant in Will's life, and sooner or later Will Graham would realise that and, hopefully, trust Hannibal that bit more.

Will was silent, as he usually was at the beginning of all their sessions, and Hannibal left him alone to sort through his thoughts. Will needed to come to him first. All Hannibal could do was offer his ear, his understanding, and let Will take what he wanted. It had gotten easier with each passing session, and it was becoming second nature to Will; he would always come to Hannibal with his problems. Soon, he would *only* come to Hannibal.

Finally, Will turned to briefly meet his eyes, smiling as he did, and Hannibal offered a smile in return. Will opened his mouth to unload whatever it was on his mind, but was interrupted by his cellphone chirping from his pocket. Hannibal bit back his annoyance. He preferred that all his patients turn their mobiles off when in his office, but had never asked Will to do the same. It had been important to Hannibal's plans; he liked overhearing the cases that Will was called away on. It meant that Hannibal already had an in, an awareness of what Will was doing, which would make it easier for Will to discuss it with him.

Will threw Hannibal an apologetic look and stood as he pulled out his cellphone. He pressed a button and answered with a polite, 'Hello?' Hannibal watched as Will frowned, then sighed, then frowned again. 'Jack, I'm not sure it'd be wise...' he trailed off, frowned some more, then glanced at Hannibal. 'Yes, I understand that, but I haven't been cleared to return to the field.' Another pause. 'I'm with Dr Lecter now.'

He looked at Hannibal again and Hannibal cocked an eyebrow, just waiting and willing to listen, but also willing to stay out of Will's business if that was what Will preferred. Even if it concerned Hannibal in some way.

'Okay,' Will swallowed and pulled the phone from his ear. 'Jack wants to know if I can go back into the field.'

Hannibal pondered that briefly. It would be a bad idea to send Will back into the field. Though now medically healthy, that didn't mean that Will was anywhere near *mentally* healthy. Hannibal was certain that it would be best if Will never returned to the field, instead locking himself away in his classroom to give lectures for the rest of his days.

There was a high chance that Will would have a panic attack or some form of breakdown. And, if that happened, either Jack or Will himself would call Hannibal to deal with the aftermath. Which could only help Hannibal sink his claws that much deeper into Will.

'You are medically and mentally fit for duty, Will,' Hannibal finally allowed. 'Although,' he stressed, making sure he had Will's attention before continuing, 'it's up to you whether or not you feel *ready* to return to the field.'

Will nodded jerkily at that, and his eyes darted around the office. Hannibal wondered what he was thinking; that he felt safe here, in this office. Safe with Hannibal, a man who understood him. And now Jack wanted to rip him away from that, force him into a place where Will felt neither safe nor in control.

Will, of course, nodded and brought the phone back to his ear. 'Can you text me the address?'

Will and Jack exchanged short goodbyes before Will hung up, and his cellphone chirped mere seconds later with what Hannibal assumed was a new crime scene.

'I'm sorry about this,' Will said, giving Hannibal an apologetic look. 'I should have known Jack'd want me back in the field as soon as possible.'

'Uncle Jack feels the need to catch absolutely every killer he even remotely scents,' Hannibal said, which earned him a delightful little chuckle from the profiler. 'If you have any issues, Will, I want you to call me immediately,' Hannibal added. Will's eyes darted up to his before resting on his chin. 'No matter what the time, day or night,' Hannibal said. 'Do you understand me, Will?'

'Yeah,' Will nodded, 'yeah, uh... thank you.. Hannibal.'

Hannibal smiled at the use of his first name, and kept the smile even after he'd shown Will out with a promise to meet again in the next few days to make up for their interrupted session. When he shut the door Hannibal sighed and briefly rubbed his eyes.

His plan to corrupt Will seemed to have turned back on him. None of Hannibal's smiles were ever real, not really. The only real smiles he wore were gifted to his victims, and they never lived long enough to tell anybody, let alone remark upon them.

Will was a treasure in every sense of the word, but he was a personal problem, too. Hannibal wondered when, exactly, Will had crawled under his skin and become a real addiction. And whether or not he could keep Will there.

{oOo}

Will had been near giddy when no headache, shaking, or sweating had accompanied his retreat from the killer's mind and return to his own. He was still slightly dazed and nauseated, but he felt more comfortable, more sane, than he had in years. Despite the dead body, presented to the team on a bed of golden sheets and red rose petals, Will felt good. He only wished that Jack hadn't pulled him away from Hannibal's office to show him this. Will would much prefer the doctor's company over a dead body's. Or Jack's, for that matter.

This week's killer was new, an amateur, but thought himself something special. It was in the way he placed the victim- a young girl, roughly in her mid-teens, with dyed red hair and bright blue lips- and the attempts at grandeur that he'd failed at spectacularly. Rather than feeling romantic and understated, the scene was garish and heavy-handed. He was clearly a novice, but one who would continue to kill until he'd perfected his chosen art. Or, until the person of his affections returned his feelings.

Will wasn't sure exactly who the intended was, but got the feeling that it was a woman, younger, perhaps a girl with red hair who favoured blue lipstick. The killer wanted to show off his skills, prove that he was the best choice, while also honouring her and her differences. It was completely ridiculous, there was no art here whatsoever, thus Will's conclusion included a few scathing remarks towards the killer that had both Beverly and Price snickering in the corner.

Jack was just happy to have his profiler back and stable, so nodded his thanks at Will before sending him on his way. Will glanced at his cell when he climbed into his car and found that it was nearing eight o'clock. Despite the murder having been in Baltimore, between answering the team's questions, looking over the body, and relaying everything to Jack countless times, time had flown, and Will found his stomach growling and his mind wishing for better company.

Despite Hannibal's parting words, Will didn't want to call him, not so soon. Hannibal had probably already started dinner, one of his food masterpieces soon to be adorning his large dining room table. Maybe he had a guest, a friend, someone who belonged to his world but not Will's.

Will sighed and started his car. He'd call Hannibal tomorrow. He knew that the man's last patient was at five, because he was always Hannibal's final one on Friday night. Tomorrow Will would try and get them back into their usual schedule, while poking and prodding to try and change it up a bit. Friends sometimes had dinner together, right? And, as Hannibal had often told him, Will wasn't officially a patient.

{oOo}

The case ended up keeping Will and Hannibal apart for a good four weeks. Every three days another body was found, the victim's hair dyed red or auburn, lips painted blue, sheets gold

and roses scattered throughout whatever room she'd been left in.

Despite the evidence found- semen and saliva, fingerprints from a petal found by one victim's head- with nothing to test it against, compare it to, they were basically going around in circles. There were a few leads here and there, and Katz found a connection between four of the victims; they all went to the same hair salon, so she, Jack, Will and Zeller went around to all of the businesses on the street asking questions. Jack had gotten suspicious of a man named Nathan Miller who worked at the coffee shop across from the hair salon, especially when one of his co-workers mentioned that Miller was obsessed with the red-haired hairdresser who worked weekends at the salon.

Will wasn't really needed to run background checks and pour over evidence yet again, so decided to drop in on Hannibal. He'd called first but had gotten Hannibal's voicemail, but decided to take a chance and visit the older man's office anyway. He'd mention that he hadn't had a chance to eat yet today and Hannibal, always serious about one's health and what food they put into their body, would be outraged if Will casually murmured something about fastfood. Will would get to see that little frown Hannibal sometimes wore, and he might also get a delicious meal and a night in Hannibal's company. Will could be manipulative when he wanted to be, and right now he *really* wanted.

He was still nervous as all hell when he knocked on Hannibal's office door in the patient's waiting room. He hoped that the man didn't have a patient, because it'd be rude to interrupt, and Hannibal deplored rude people. Getting on the man's bad side wasn't productive to getting a dinner out of him.

Thankfully when Hannibal opened the door he was alone, and a small smile spread across his face when he saw Will.

'Will, please come in,' he said, his standard greeting to all those who came to see him. Will stepped into the office, briefly brushing past Hannibal, and enjoyed the warmth and solidness of the man that he got to sample before he walked further into the room.

'I'm sorry if I've interrupted anything,' Will murmured, glancing around the office. It was empty apart from them. 'I called but I got your voicemail,' Will added as Hannibal shut the door.

'My apologies,' Hannibal said. 'I recently gained a new patient who enjoys meeting at five pm on Friday afternoons,' he explained as he took Will's coat and hung it up on the hook by the door. 'You just missed her, in fact, and I was finishing up some paperwork before heading home.' He held an arm out, gesturing for Will to sit, and Will did, smiling slightly as he sunk into the familiar, comfortable cushion. Hannibal took his customary seat opposite and crossed his legs. 'I haven't seen you in four weeks, Will,' he stated, lips curving up slightly when Will briefly held eye contact. 'How have you been?'

'Busy,' Will sighed. Hannibal raised an eyebrow, but didn't ask for an elaboration. As always, he simply waited, willing to listen to whatever Will wanted to share. 'It's the same case I was called away for,' Will explained.

'The girls with blue lipstick?' Hannibal queried.

Will nodded. Hannibal had briefly been consulted two weeks previously when Alana Bloom had voiced worry over Will working so much after his hospital stay. Though Will hadn't spoken to Hannibal, he'd heard from Beverly that Hannibal had expressed concern over Will, but had been adamant that Will could take care of himself.

'We're not really any closer to catching the guy,' Will sighed. He scrubbed a hand over his face. 'Jack has a suspect, but I'm not sure it'll lead to anything. Sometimes I wish serial killers would leave business cards.'

Hannibal's lips curled up into a smirk, but it disappeared when Will glanced over his face, eyes not meeting Hannibal's before they drifted over the doctor's office.

'Indeed,' Hannibal eventually commented. 'However, even killers are rarely courteous.'

'Yeah,' Will chuckled.

'Have you been sleeping well?' Hannibal asked suddenly, drawing Will's attention. Will wondered if he really looked that tired. Or maybe Hannibal was just really good at reading people; at reading *Will*.

'Sleeping well? Yes,' Will said. 'Sleeping enough? Probably not.'

'Working too hard?' Hannibal questioned, and Will nodded.

'The case has us all rushing around,' Will explained. 'A body every three days doesn't give us much chance to focus on one before another shows up.'

'And are you doing well, delving into this killer's head every three days?' Hannibal asked softly. 'You're recovering admirably, Will, and I don't want you to push yourself too hard.'

Will sighed. 'I know,' he said, 'but-'

'But you want to catch killers,' Hannibal interrupted smoothly- and correctly, Will thought. 'However, your own health can't take a back seat to your work. Yes, you can catch killers. But what is the point if you burn yourself out?'

'I'm saving people,' Will mumbled, a half-hearted attempt at winning the argument.

'Saving people is all well and good, but not at the cost of your own life,' Hannibal said. 'Someone has to save Will Graham.'

'So I should save myself?' Will asked with a bit of amusement. He noticed Hannibal echoing it, however subtle.

'With a little help from your friends, certainly,' Hannibal agreed.

Will felt his heart flutter and determinedly beat it down. Yes, Hannibal was gorgeous. Yes, he was always there for Will. No, he'd never given any signs that he could be even remotely interested in Will. Still, it had been harder lately to ignore Hannibal's presence in his life, and

what said presence did to Will. His head was clear, and it clearly wanted more of the European.

Will's stomach chose that moment to gurgle, and Will blushed as Hannibal raised an amused eyebrow.

'I take it that you haven't been eating regularly, either,' Hannibal said, his tone slightly chastising.

'Not really, no,' Will admitted.

'Than I insist that you join me for dinner, Will,' Hannibal decided. He stood suddenly, and Will blinked, his mouth hanging open slightly. 'I won't take no for an answer,' Hannibal threatened, though his eyes were light, voice teasing.

'I couldn't-' Will began, but Hannibal seemed determined.

'I am your friend, as well as your doctor, and I have an interest in your health,' Hannibal stated. 'We can easily talk at my home over, or after, a good meal.'

Will blinked again. Well... he *had* been hoping to wrangle a dinner out of the older man, but hadn't thought that it'd be this easy.

'Okay,' Will finally agreed, and saw satisfaction flash in Hannibal's eyes.

'Shall we?' Hannibal asked, gesturing towards the door, and Will chuckled as he stood.

'Yes,' he said. 'Thank you, Hannibal.'

'You're welcome,' Hannibal said. He smiled as Will walked past him, towards his coat. The night would have ended differently if Hannibal hadn't insisted on answering the knock that then sounded at the door. Rather than ignore it, like Will had hoped he would, Hannibal gave him a brief smile before walking towards the door that led the patient's waiting room. He pulled it open, and Will turned sharply when he heard the smack of flesh on flesh.

Hannibal stumbled back, cheek bloody and eyes furious, and was followed into the office by a tall man wielding a large knife.

It was Nathan Miller, Jack's suspect, the man Will had interviewed only a few hours earlier. Will spun on the spot as Miller slammed the door shut and looked between them.

'Nobody moves!' he ordered, and Hannibal paused from where he'd been about to step forward- whether to confront Miller or render him unconscious, Will didn't know. He was glad that Hannibal *had* paused, because the large stainless steel knife Miller was carrying looked sharp, and he clearly knew how to use it. Though Hannibal had been attacked and had successfully defended himself in the past, Will didn't want to see if he could do it again.

'Calm down,' Hannibal tried, but Miller snarled at him.

'This doesn't concern you!' he hissed.

'I think you will find that it does,' Hannibal said in a completely calm voice. 'You struck me, after all.'

'Shut up and you'll live,' Miller growled. He then turned his sights on Will, and Will missed the flash of *rage* that entered Hannibal's eyes. 'You!' he glared at Will. 'You've ruined everything!'

Will swallowed thickly. 'What have I ruined, Mr Miller?'

'My art!' Miller shouted. 'My masterpiece! I'll never get to finish it, gift it, if I get arrested!'

'Who was your art for?' Will asked, hoping that if he played on Miller's plans he'd get... something; time or a chance to disarm Miller and take him down. The man only had a knife, and Will had Hannibal.

'Irene,' Miller admitted immediately. 'Irene's perfect, and she doesn't know me.'

'But she will, correct?' Hannibal joined in, not at all moved by the anger Miller directed at him when he spoke. 'After all, you created five separate pieces for her. Surely she cannot ignore you when you've designed five perfect works to honour her.'

A small smile tugged at Miller's lips, and he nodded quickly, blonde hair flopping into his face. 'Exactly!' he said, pointing the knife at Hannibal, more as a statement than a threat. 'She'll see how much I love her, what I'm capable of. She'll love me.'

'Of course,' Hannibal agreed easily.

Will's gun was still clipped to his side; having travelled from investigating a lead with Jack to Hannibal's office, he hadn't bothered taking it off. Now he fingered the strap, popped the button as Nathan Miller ranted about his art, his masterpiece, accusing Will and by extension Hannibal of ruining his life's work in-between looking at Hannibal for confirmation that he was a truly gifted artist. Will had just drawn his weapon when Miller struck again, trying to wrap his arm around Hannibal's neck. He somewhat succeeded, seeing as how Hannibal fought back immediately.

Will rushed forward; he couldn't, *wouldn't*, shoot with Hannibal in the line of fire, but he could at least help, try and knock Miller out. There were flailing limbs and grunts of anger and pain, and Will managed to knock the butt of his gun into Miller's head before his feet were kicked out from beneath him. His gun went skidding away, thumping loudly against the floorboards of Hannibal's office.

Will ignored it for now and launched himself at the tangle that was Hannibal and Miller. Hannibal had elbowed Miller in the head, but hadn't yet broken the taller man's hold around him, and his face was turning red from the pressure around his throat. Miller was bleeding from a cut to the nose but otherwise looked unharmed, and Will tried to change that by punching the younger man in the face, then the kidneys when he still wouldn't let go.

Hannibal finally managed to break free from the grasp, gasping in lungfuls of air. He stumbled off to the side, and with both his arms loose, Miller was free to attack Will to the

best of his ability. He was at least four inches taller than Will, with roughly twenty pounds more in weight, and it showed when Will punched him again, and again, only to get a snarl of anger rather than real pain. Will ducked two punches but caught a glancing blow from one of Miller's fists. He felt it reverberate through his skull, instantly making his head ache, and it was enough for Miller to get the jump on Will again and force him to the floor.

Will's heart thumped painfully in his chest when he felt an arm wrap around his neck, then pressure as he was choked. He clawed and lashed out, but Miller had a good hold, had clearly done this before.

'*They were all strangled,*' Beverly Katz's voice echoed through his head. *Of course*, Will would have groaned if he could.

Miller squeezed tighter, and Will bit his own tongue as he choked. Only seconds later the pressure was gone and Will collapsed onto his side, throat and chest both burning as he sucked in large quantities of air.

Will finally managed to raise his head and, although groggy, had a perfect view of Hannibal and Miller fighting. Miller was tall and lean, much like Hannibal, but had more defined muscles, bigger hands, arms and legs. Will was sure that Hannibal, despite having already proven that he could defend himself, was going to fall; Will would be forced to watch Hannibal, the only true friend he had, the man who could be so much more, *die*.

Will briefly pulled his eyes away from the two men to try and find his gun, and spotted it by the light blue lounge across the room. He tried to get to his feet but fell, and settled for a scramble-slide across the floorboards. He heard a shout of pain behind him, and wasn't sure if it was Hannibal or Miller. It made him crawl that much faster, and he banged his head against the lounge as he reached beneath it for his weapon.

When he turned, gun up and hand only slightly shaking, he spotted them over by the red-white curtains. Will was about to stand, either shout for Miller to freeze or just outright shoot the bastard, when everything changed.

Miller swung, the blow short and low, but Hannibal easily dodged, practically sliding back on the tips of his toes to avoid it. His hair was dishevelled, his clothing too, and his neck bleeding from where Miller had slashed him. But he was completely focused, his body poised and each movement graceful as he avoided Miller or struck back.

Hannibal was trained, Will realised, it was evident in the way he held himself, in every duck and weave.

Suddenly Miller swung too high, arm too wide, and Hannibal took the opening. He struck hard and fast, fist slamming into Miller's throat and making the younger man choke, eyes suddenly bulging and hands clawing at skin.

It was a blow that was taught in almost every self-defence class, and Hannibal executed it perfectly, with enough pressure that Miller's windpipe was instantly crushed. It would swell, Will knew, and suffocate him within minutes.

It was practised, something Hannibal had done before, and Will's eyes widened when Miller dropped to his knees and made horrible, desperate choking sounds. Hannibal just stood over him panting, his face sweaty, lip busted open and blood trickling from a small cut on his cheek.

When Hannibal glanced up at Will, seeming to know exactly where he was, his eyes were dark and feral, the things swimming just beneath the surface far more dangerous than anything Will had encountered before.

'Will,' Hannibal breathed.

'Who are you?' Will demanded.

Hannibal inhaled in sharply but didn't move. Will still had his gun, and Miller's knife had been tossed aside somewhere. Hannibal wouldn't be able to get to it before Will shot him; or before Will figured out the truth.

'Will, you're in shock,' Hannibal said softly, smoothly, and Will couldn't believe that he'd never been able to tell just how *fake* it was. Everything about Hannibal screamed *danger*, from his sharp eyes and his strong jaw, right down to his impeccable suits.

Even his house . Will thought about the elegance, the comfort, yet of how sterile and cold it could be, how everything was positioned *just so* to tell a story, to make you believe that the man living there was intelligent, sophisticated. Yet none of it invited you to inquire, to learn more. It just told you what was on the surface, what Hannibal presented, nothing about what kind of man he really was.

Will's mind was working fast, faster than it had in months, possibly years. Hannibal maintained eye contact and Will felt himself slipping into the older man, becoming him. He wasn't scared of Will, despite the weapon still clutched in the profiler's hand. He was annoyed about Miller- how *dare* he even *think* that he was on Hannibal's level, that he could even step foot in Hannibal's office and *fight him* - and he was worried about Will.

Not about Will's possible injuries, no, Hannibal could see that, physically, at least, Will was fine. He was more worried about what Will would do; would he pull the trigger, and put Hannibal down like the monster so many people thought he might be? Would he run and contact Jack, giving Hannibal time to make his escape? Or would he accept Hannibal for what he was- for what he'd always known he was, but been unable to truly *see* ?

What would Will do?

There was no grief over what he had done- no, because Hannibal had killed before- no worry about future psychopaths invading his office, not even any fear about what Jack and the FBI would think of Hannibal killing someone yet again.

Killing someone in a way that spoke of experience.

'What are you?' Will demanded this time, and pointed his gun at Hannibal. Hannibal halted suddenly; he hadn't been gaining much ground, only stepping slightly closer to Will with

each passing minute. Now he paused and raised his hands so they hovered above his thighs, palms up to show that he was unarmed, would make no sudden move to attack.

'Will,' Hannibal said slowly, and Will could read the true affection there, mixed as it was with curiosity and annoyance, 'you know who I am.'

'Not really, no,' Will said, shaking his head briefly. 'I know who you pretend to be.'

Hannibal's lips twitched, but he contained the smile that Will knew he wanted to let free. 'Why would I pretend to be anyone other than who I am?'

Will's eyes darted to Miller, now dead and lying on the floor. Hannibal tracked the movement but didn't break his gaze from the profiler.

'I can see you now,' Will breathed.

Hannibal cocked an eyebrow. 'Can you?' he asked- no, *taunted* - and spread his arms wide, palms still up. He held Will's gaze easily, forcing Will to return it. 'Can you really?' he questioned and raised his arms further, as though to say, *Look at me, Will. Look carefully and tell me what you see.*

Tell me my design.

It was as though Will had been pushed rather than pulled, like his mind wanted him to delve into who Hannibal was and what Hannibal was hiding. He fell and fell and fell...

Darkness pressing in all around, swallowing him until he wasn't sure where he ended and it began. Maybe it didn't. Maybe he had been born this way, this different, and all it had taken was that one key moment to bring it all to the surface, to change him completely .

The monsters that swam here were unlike anything else, because he was unlike anything else. He was so much better, a step above, another breed entirely. The people that swarmed around him were like animals, pigs; useful sometimes, but mostly annoying little pests that he would swat whenever he fancied.

Look at them, running around, thinking that they knew better, that they knew him. Petty children with their equally petty worries, scampering about like chickens with their heads chopped off.

They never looked, never even sensed what he was, what he carried with him; what he could, and would, do to them given half the chance. Because he always gave them a chance, he was merciful. If they failed he would take because they didn't deserve . *Why let them carry on when they could be used for better things?*

They were amusing, everything was amusing, never truly serious unless it concerned him. And when matters did, he was quick to act, to do whatever necessary to protect himself, because he was all that mattered, he was all that he had left. Sometimes, rarely, someone would worm their way in, but they always lost his interest, because they never understood.

Could Will see him, now? Could Will Graham, gifted profiler, see through the mask that his doctor- his friend- wore all day every day to confuse the masses of sheep that inhabited this little marble?

Could he see the grace, the poise, the way he so easily manipulated those around him, enjoying his fun and games until it was time to deliver a swift blow?

Could he see that what he did was art? He elevated these pigs, made them so much more in death than they ever were in real life. And why not? He could, and so he would. He wanted, so he took. He enjoyed... oh, he enjoyed so much; the spill of blood, the give of flesh, the mounting, the gift-wrapping, the meat-

Will was forced back to himself violently and inhaled sharply. Suddenly aware, he realised that he was absolutely covered in sweat, so much so that his t-shirt was sticking to him beneath his plaid shirt, and the gun had slipped almost completely from his fingers.

Hannibal was crouched before him, hair still a mess, lip still bleeding, red eyes still *so dark* . He had his head tilted, and was regarding Will as though he were a particularly interesting specimen... or animal.

Because that was all Will was, right? An animal, a test, an experiment that had gone wrong. Will hadn't behaved the exact way Hannibal had wanted him to despite the psychiatrist's deceptions, and it made Will's breath come that much faster, made it that much more difficult to swallow past the lump that had settled in his throat.

'Oh God,' Will panted, 'oh God, it was *you* .'

Hannibal's head tilted that little bit further.

'You-You killed them,' Will gulped.

'Killed who, Will?' Hannibal asked, pleasant as you please.

'I don't know how many,' Will managed to get out, 'you don't always kill as the Chesapeake Ripper, do you?'

A beautiful, satisfied smile crept over Hannibal's face, and Will hated himself for finding it *beautiful* ; for continuing to want the man, even now, when faced with the truth of what Hannibal was.

'I did hope that you would eventually figure it out without me having to aid you,' Hannibal said slowly, measuring each word before it left his mouth. He always did, Will realised. Hannibal had remained free this long before he was so careful, so in control. Jack would never catch him if Hannibal didn't allow it.

Will wondered if he was the first to figure it out, and then remembered Miriam Lass.

'J-Jack's trainee?' he managed to ask.

Hannibal cocked his head to the other side. 'Ah, yes,' he mused.

'You cut her arm off,' Will mumbled, and that drew a chuckle from the doctor.

'Indeed,' he agreed. 'She got lucky. I was the on-call surgeon when one of the Ripper victims was brought into the hospital. She was looking into his associates, hoping to find a lead, and my name was on the ledger. When she came here I realised that I couldn't let her leave; if she had connected me to one victim, she could connect me to others. She found the drawing I had made of one of the victims- the Wounded Man, remember?'

Will just nodded jerkily, eyes never leaving Hannibal's face; his sharp nose, olive skin, thin lips...

'I'd already decided to kill her,' Hannibal continued, voice still pleasant and measured. 'She struggled but it was too late. As soon as she walked into my office she was dead.' Hannibal's eyes flashed when they met Will's once more, and Will swallowed thickly. 'She didn't find me, Will, she was simply lucky. Perhaps, in time, she would have put it all together. You, on the other hand, definitely would have. Especially now that you are healthy.'

'Did you know?' Will asked. 'That I was sick?'

'Yes,' Hannibal admitted. 'I convinced Dr Sutcliffe to keep it from you.'

'Why?' Will demanded.

'I was curious,' Hannibal stated.

Will snorted and shook his head. The gun slipped further from his grasp, but it was pointed at the floor. Will briefly wondered when that had happened. 'I shouldn't be surprised,' he muttered. 'You're a psychopath.' He glanced up to see Hannibal's reaction, only to find the man regarding him with undisguised curiosity. 'Do you consider yourself a psychopath, Dr Lecter?'

Hannibal's lips twitched again. 'I believe that I meet certain requirements needed to diagnose someone as a psychopath,' he said. 'However, as I'm sure you've realised, I believe myself to be above such petty...'

'Humans?' Will supplied.

'Labels,' Hannibal corrected.

'But you like the Ripper,' Will stated. His eyes flicked up to meet Hannibal's, and he held the older man's gaze as he continued. 'You like that the FBI- that *Jack* - is hunting you. You like playing with them, beating them, proving that you're *better* .'

'Aren't I?' Hannibal queried.

'There are hundreds of serial killers out there,' Will said. He licked his lips. 'I've caught every one I've gone after.'

'But you've never specifically gone after the Chesapeake Ripper, Will,' Hannibal reminded him. 'You've gone over the cases, have even seen the bodies I've left behind, but you've never

gone after the Ripper specifically.'

'Not yet,' Will breathed.

Hannibal eased forward slightly, still crouching, one hand resting on his knee, the other on the floor. Will wondered how many people those hands had held, touched, *killed* . He wondered how many different people Hannibal had fed to *him* , and was disgusted by how *not* disgusted that thought made him feel.

Nothing made sense any more. Will was sane, Hannibal wasn't, and there was a dead man lying a few feet from them.

'No, not yet,' Hannibal agreed. 'You have three choices, Will.'

Will snorted. 'You're actually giving me choices?' he demanded. He was actually surprised that he was still alive, but figured that Hannibal wasn't quite done with him just yet. He was still curious- about what, Will didn't know- and didn't feel the need to snap Will's neck.

Yet .

'Yes, Will,' Hannibal smiled, amused. 'Three,' he continued. 'One; you fight me now, try to shoot me, and I kill you before leaving. Two; you fight me, somehow manage to escape, and call Jack. I still run. Three; you walk out of here alive, don't call anyone, and we go about our lives as if nothing happened.'

'Just walk out?' Will echoed. 'Leave you alone to continue killing and *eating people* ?'

'Yes,' Hannibal said. Like it was that easy. Like Will should just ignore what Hannibal was doing, the people Hannibal was killing, and pretend like he didn't know.

Will shook his head. 'There's another option you didn't consider.'

'Oh?'

'I kill you, call Jack, and in a few years everybody forgets who Hannibal Lecter is. You'll be nothing but a name on a tombstone.'

Hannibal smiled. 'I have no plans to die any time soon, Will. And I don't believe that you could kill me.'

'I have a gun.'

'That has been pointed at the floor for the past seven minutes, by my reckoning,' Hannibal said. Will swallowed thickly. 'I suppose that there is a fifth option I hadn't thought obtainable any longer.'

'W-What?' Will asked, hating how his voice cracked. But Hannibal was too close, far too close. Hannibal was a murderer, a cannibal, had been manipulating Will since the date they met. Will gulped and tried to ignore the faint scent of Hannibal's cologne, still heady despite what was happening. *What the fuck is wrong with me?*

'You could embrace what you have learned about me,' Hannibal said slowly, like he was imparting some great wisdom upon Will, 'and you could join me.'

'Excuse me?' Will blurted.

'Join me, Will.'

'I'm not a killer.'

'Aren't you?'

Will scowled. 'Not like you!' he spat.

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. 'No, not like me,' he agreed. 'Not yet.'

'No,' Will shook his head. 'I know what you wanted, Hannibal, but I'm not a fucking killer!'

'Language,' Hannibal chastised, and Will almost laughed. It would have been an hysterical laugh, completely broken, and Will might just have broken along with it.

'You eat the rude, don't you?' he near-giggled.

'Not all the time,' Hannibal admitted. 'Sometimes, there are those that I would not dare put in my body. But most of the time, yes, my meat comes from those who have been unapologetically rude.'

'A serial killer who eats the rude,' Will breathed.

Hannibal shifted suddenly until he was on his knees rather than crouching, and his bones cracked ever so slightly. 'Breathe, Will,' he ordered, 'I don't wish you to have a panic attack.'

'Since when do you care about me?' Will grumbled even as he slowed his breathing. He let his eyes drop to Hannibal's suit-clad thighs, which were just as nice as Hannibal's face, but didn't present the danger of Will getting sucked into the murderous dark.

'I've cared about you a great deal for a while now, Will,' Hannibal said. There was something in his voice that forced Will to look up, meet his eyes. That blackness was still there- those monsters still completely on display- but there was a smoothness, like melted chocolate, muting the edges, making Hannibal seem more human than Will had ever seen. 'I care about you too much, Will,' Hannibal continued. Will snorted. 'If you were anyone else,' Hannibal said, tone rather sharp, 'I would have killed you already and disposed of your body along with our would-be-killer's.'

Will licked his lips and looked away once more, eyes settling on Hannibal's tie; still perfect, despite the fight, despite everything that had happened.

He let himself feel, just briefly, just enough to discern if Hannibal was still faking or, finally, telling the truth. What he found was that continued annoyance, that curiosity that couldn't be smothered, not now, and... and feelings, real, true feelings. Not in the traditional sense, not even in the healthy sense. Hannibal was obsessed with Will, and it had forced him to care, to

protect, to treat Will like he hadn't treated anyone else in many, many years; decades, probably.

It was clear, at least to Will, that Hannibal had no idea what to do with that concern. A part of him wanted to end Will now, wrap an arm around his throat and squeeze until Will stopped struggling, stopped breathing, stopped occupying so much space in Hannibal's head. Another part wanted to keep Will around, to break him and then re-make him into a glorious monster that could hunt with Hannibal's, sharing the prey they brought down together.

And there was another part, small but potent, that just wanted to *keep* Will. It wanted to protect Will from the monsters of the world, because Hannibal was the only monster allowed to touch and taint, the only monster that would ever be good enough for Will. It would protect, nurture, cherish, because Will was *his* and Hannibal would rip apart anyone who dared to try and take that away.

All of them were battling, even now, and even Hannibal wasn't sure which would win. The first part would be the safest for Hannibal; Will was a very real threat and he should be taken care of before Will's conscience reared its head and forced Will to do the *good* thing. But it wasn't as strong as the monster and man, who both wanted to keep Will, keep him safe yet break him at the same time.

Will wasn't sure what part of Hannibal he wanted to win, either. He wasn't sure it would matter. It wasn't like he had a choice.

Hannibal leaned forward suddenly, breaking Will from his thoughts. Long, olive fingers wrapped around Will's wrist, loose but very much there. Stroking slightly, Hannibal said, 'It's up to you now, Will. You know me. Will you let me know you?'

Will gulped and glanced from Hannibal to the gun he was still holding. He *did* have a choice. He could fight Hannibal, force the monster to kill him. He could let Hannibal go and pretend this had never happened, or even call Jack as soon as he was safe and far, far away from the doctor.

or...

Or .

'There's a sixth option,' Will finally murmured.

'Is there?' Hannibal asked.

'Yeah,' Will said and glanced up. Hannibal's eyes were on him, though Will was sure they'd never left. No, Hannibal would watch his every move until he was certain- or, mostly certain- that this night would end in his favour. 'You deal with Miller, we both pretend this never happened, and we go back to your house for dinner and then bed.'

Hannibal's eyebrows rose, but Will was silent, waiting. He was sure Hannibal knew that he didn't mean sex; at least not now, not yet. A few weeks ago Will would have jumped at the

chance to be interesting to Hannibal, would have jumped right into the older man's bed, no questions asked. Now there were too many questions, too many uncertainties.

'Is that what you want, Will?' Hannibal finally said, asking instead of answering. 'Do you want to come home with me?'

'I don't know,' Will laughed. 'I don't want you to go to jail. I don't want to tell Jack. I don't want to help you kill people, and I...'

'You what?' Hannibal pressed.

Will closed his eyes. 'I don't want to lose you,' he whispered.

He heard Hannibal shift, the sound of him swallowing thickly, perhaps re-evaluating the situation. Finally, Will felt Hannibal's fingers ghost over his own, up and over until he was holding the gun rather than Will's hand. 'Let go of the gun, Will,' Hannibal ordered.

Will did and it slipped from his fingers. He half expected the sound of a gunshot, of pain and disappointment and... and who knows what else. Instead he felt strong hands grip beneath his arms and lift until he was on his feet; shaky, off-balance, but standing all the same.

He looked up to find Hannibal still watching him, his maroon eyes softer than they'd ever been before. 'Can you help me take care of the body, Will?'

Taking a deep breath, Will nodded. He hadn't killed Miller, after all. And he'd been telling the truth before; while he had no wish to help Hannibal kill, he didn't want to lose the man either. Hannibal was his friend, his doctor, his confidant, his... *everything.* Whether that was because of Hannibal's manipulations and those alone, Will wasn't sure. It was probably that as well as Will's own need for a companion, his own need to find someone, anyone, who understood him, accepted him, and still wanted him.

Hannibal was offering all of that. He just had his own baggage.

'Good,' Hannibal said and pulled him closer. 'Come with me,' he murmured then, and Will stepped forward himself, though let Hannibal guide him. He had no idea where they'd go from here, but Hannibal probably had a dozen different plans.

Will wondered what would happen next.

{Fin}

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